

## COIL Report

by Teglas Edina, 2<sup>nd</sup> year student, PCU

The second Collaborative Online International Learning project is an online program that focuses on interdisciplinary subjects. This course helped clarify the meaning of "interdisciplinary," which refers to the integration of two or more fields of knowledge. The primary focus was on combining literature and history. Throughout the four sessions, we explored different authors and works, examining them in the context of their respective time periods and understanding how historical events influenced the literature.

The first lesson, led by Maria Hrickova, provided an engaging introduction to Herman Melville's life and work. We began by analyzing the thought-provoking quote, "It is better to fail in originality than to succeed in imitation." I found this statement resonant, as success through imitation feels dishonest and carries a sense of shame. It is far more rewarding to fail while pursuing something original, as there's pride in staying true to oneself rather than copying others. We then linked key events in Melville's life to his writing, helping us better understand his experiences and influences. Additionally, we discussed a letter Melville wrote to his eleven-year-old son, Malcolm, during his 1860 voyage on the *Meteor*. The letter revealed his empathy for sailors, his sharp observational skills, and his fascination with the power of nature. While the letter is valuable as a biographical source, it is limited by its selective focus and possible embellishments, offering only a glimpse into his life. A second letter described his voyage, mentioning warm weather, a visit to a whaling ship, and preparations for arriving in San Francisco. He also included a geography lesson for his son and advice to be respectful to his mother, ending with affection and a small gift for his daughter, Fanny. I found the lesson well-structured and informative, enhancing my understanding of Melville's work and its context.

The next session, again led by Maria Hrickova, focused on the epic poem *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon culture. We explored the magical, mysterious world of the poem, which has inspired many fantasy writers, including J.R.R. Tolkien. The Prologue introduces Shield, a legendary Danish king who rose from orphanhood to greatness, and his descendants, including Hrothgar, who exemplifies values such as bravery, generosity, and loyalty. In Anglo-Saxon culture, kings were expected to distribute treasures to form alliances and ensure prosperity, with leadership seen as divinely ordained and requiring strength, wisdom, and the ability to inspire respect and fear. Funeral rites, such as sending the king out to sea on a treasure-laden ship, symbolized honor and preparation for the afterlife. The *Beowulf* manuscript, one of the earliest known texts in Old English, is preserved by the British Library and reflects a blend of history and legend. The poem is written in alliterative verse, a characteristic of oral storytelling traditions. We also connected *Beowulf* to the Sutton Hoo Ship Burial, an important archaeological site in Suffolk, England. Dating back to the 7th century, the burial's rich artifacts, including weapons and treasures like the Sutton Hoo helmet, reflect the martial and ceremonial values depicted in the poem. Other artifacts, like the Ruthwell Cross and the Franks Casket, show the blending of pagan and Christian traditions of the era. These relics offer valuable insight into the culture that influenced *Beowulf*. Both sessions provided valuable information and were enriched by group projects.

The third session, led by Erik György, focused on poetry from World War I. We discussed the evolving attitudes toward the war, from its outbreak to its tragic conclusion, through the eyes of poets who experienced it firsthand. We also analyzed three World War I propaganda posters, which conveyed powerful messages about war, duty, and national pride, often aligning with the literature of the time. The first poster, "Destroy This Mad Brute," depicted Germany as a monstrous ape invading America, evoking fear and urging enlistment. The second poster, urging women to buy Liberty Bonds, emphasized the home front's role in supporting the war effort and the sacrifices made by women. The third, "The Empire Needs Men," used the image of a lion and cubs to symbolize the unity of the British colonies and called for men of all ages to join the war effort. These posters highlighted the intersection of visual and literary propaganda in shaping public opinion and fostering nationalist fervor during the war.

These lessons provided a deeper understanding of the connections between literature, history, and the events that shaped each work. The combination of literature and history offers endless possibilities for discovery for those truly interested in the subject. Overall, the lectures were well-organized, with varying degrees of interactivity and engagement. Some topics were more captivating than others, but the series was valuable, and I learned a great deal that will be helpful in my future studies.